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# Burying koi

Heather Seratt

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Heather Seratt entitled "Burying koi." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Arthur Smith, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson


Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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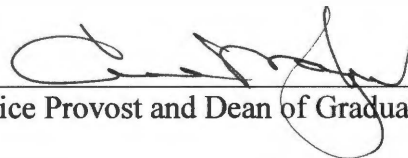


Dr. Arthur Smith, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

Thesis  
2003  
.S45

# BURYING KOI

A Thesis  
Presented for the  
Master of Arts Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Heather Seratt  
August 2003

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## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Dr. Smith for his guidance, especially in the editing of poetry and for making me familiar with an ever growing list of new-to-me poets. I would like to thank Dr. Kallet for her support, encouragement, and guidance in finding and exploring new sources for my writing. I would like to thank Dr. Leggett for graciously agreeing to be on my committee.

I would also like to thank my family and friends for their love, support, encouragement, and occasional comma.

## **Abstract**

"Burying Koi" is a collection of poems presented for partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English, with Concentration in Writing. An introduction is provided to name major influences on the poems and a general philosophy on writing.



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## Introduction

In addition to literature, the visual arts of painting, drawing, and sculpture, hold large roles in my life. I find poetry to be a medium through which I can combine interests in both art and writing. Through writing, I am able to explore color, form, imagery, and description, and to adapt aspects of what I learned in visual art courses to my poetry.

I see imagery as an important aspect in writing, a point which can both ground abstract thought and inspire it. Though oil paint is vastly different from text, I see both mediums as working to communicate in similar ways. Both use different stretches and fluxion of line to conjure an image, to present a certain message and tone, and though each line is aesthetic in its own right, through combination they work to attain a whole.

When I was member of my high school's writing team, I was expected to hone my descriptive language for 40 and 80 word timed competitions against other area schools. I was drawn to haiku first because of its brevity and sparse phrasing, which I hoped would aid me in preparation for the short stretches of writing. I found much more. I was captivated by how much is conveyed through the careful tension between image and tone. For instance, in Basho's work,

Skylark  
Sings all day,  
A day not long enough. (35)

and in Buson's winter haiku,

Miles of frost--  
On the lake  
The moon's my own. (53)

the images of all three lines tie closely together to form a both simple and intricate scene. This graceful, precise imagery and the careful introduction of emotion is what I hope to emulate in my own work. Reading haiku "feels like eating/ the same small, perfect grape/ again and again," as Billy Collins states in his poem "Japan" (51). I began working to shift my work from purely descriptive writing into work that I hoped would have more purpose, work able to carry a message, an idea. Emphasis placed on imagery, word choice, and tone has followed me throughout my growth as a writer.

Through reading haiku, I was struck by the importance of images within poetry, in that they both present an isolated aspect of a vision and can have a very strong effect on the reading of other lines. Such sparse language demands strong imagery in order to connect readers immediately with concepts and emotions. Images, especially concrete images, provide a common foundation between writers and readers. Yet, at the same time, most images will be conjured by each person in at least a slightly different way. So, with concrete imagery, a poem can have a nearly universal foundation while still providing multiple inferences into its subject.

This concept was also one shared in painting in which, outside of the title, image has to carry the artist's message-- both grounding the observer in context and freeing the message for individualized associations, changing the work for each observer while maintaining the initial intention.

When I read the poems of Langston Hughes, I became aware of the power short lines have outside of haiku. Langston Hughes's lines create mood through rhythm and series of images. The streaming of images carries readers through his work and creates

crisp illustrations and stark contrasts. This can be seen in the poem "Harlem [2]" in which descriptions blend both the putrid and sweet to communicate an undeniable tone, "Does it stink like rotten meat? / Or crust and sugar over--/ like a syrupy sweet?" (426). Langston Hughes's images quickly establish tone and focus for his subject. The short line reflects and emphasizes the speed at which the images are established and their messages communicated.

This quickness is also found in Louise Glück's work, though Glück frequently uses longer lines. Like Hughes, Glück uses a series of images to draw readers into and through her work. This is demonstrated in her book *Vita Nova*, especially in the first and last poems included, both titled "Vita Nova".

The spring of the year, young men buying tickets for the  
ferryboats.  
Laughter, because the air is full of apple blossoms.

When I woke up, I realized I was capable of the same  
feeling. ("Vita Nova [1]" ll. 2-6)

Poor Blizzard,  
why was he a dog? He barely touched  
the hummus in his dogfood dish.  
Then there was something else,  
a sound. ("Vita Nova [2]" ll. 10-15)

In these poems, imagery prods readers through abrupt transitions while tying each line closely to the next. The first lines of "Vita Nova [1]" calls on readers to establish tone through their own memories dredged up in image recall and association. The poem is very aware of this call, placing the speaker in a position similar to that of the reader. In this way, self conscious imagery works to specifically draw up references and

connotations beyond those immediately stated in the work. "Vita Nova [2]" uses imagery in much the same way, but substitutes personal memories in the place of the more generic ones called on in the first poem through the use of increasingly specific imagery. Glück's imagery does not stifle itself through personal history however, instead the personal becomes shared.

I keep Hughes's and Glück's figurative methods in mind as I struggle with the relationship of memory and remembering to the present in my work. Sharon Olds's work also places demands on imagery while discussing past and its relation to the present. Olds and Louise Glück both tackle personal histories through retelling and telling held in beautiful balance. Sharon Olds's *The Unswept Room* delves to introspective depths while posing questions to readers on morality, justice, history, responsibility, and hope. Olds's images, in addition to establishing tone and common referents, work to reveal. This revealing nature of her imagery can be seen in her use of flower imagery, especially pansies. This flower imagery works at both literal and figurative levels. Through this sort of imagery Olds is able to explore in her writing subjects and emotions that may otherwise have initially alienated readers, instead almost forcing understanding on them through common inferences made about the images used.

While much of the nature of my familial experience differs from that of Olds, her use of imagery to conjure family and the web of relationships involved provides method of approaching the material that allows for communication of material other than sheerly personal memory. In my poems, I return to family and personal experience again and again, not only because my family is an important part of my life and I do not have in-

depth knowledge of experiences outside of my own, but because I think family is a both loaded and everyday concept for most readers, one that can be used to create a familiar ground from which to explore other concepts.

Lucille Clifton and Yusef Komunyakaa both address dealing with the present when faced with memory. Neither of these poets avoid the past, personal or collective. Lucille Clifton addresses the past directly. In her poem "Why some people be mad at me sometimes" she states,

they ask me to remember  
but they want me to remember  
their memories  
and i keep on remembering  
mine (38)

shows an open-eyed view of the past and a strive for honesty.

Komunyakaa, in *Thieves of Paradise*, uses contradictions as a means of exploring the connections between war and peace, cultures and colonizers, and mankind and nature. In the prose poem "Nude Interrogation," he contrasts sex and love with war and death.

She unhooks her bra and flings it against a bookcase made of plywood and cinderblocks. *Did you use an M-16, a handgrenade, a bayonet, or your own two strong hands, both thumbs pressed against that little bird in the throat?* She stands with her left thumb hooked into the elastic of her sky-blue panties. (71)

Imagery binds together two distinct types of experiences with touching. The parallels between the types of touching presented show the struggle between the past and the present. This is also shown with the reflection of war imagery in the apartment and the woman present. The parallel of sexual imagery with destructive imagery conveys the complication of wartime experience on daily civilian life. The speaker searches for a resolution but does not find a simple solution within the poem. Instead, this search

draws again and again on the uncomfortable and often unexpected similarities between humanity and nature at both their most nurturing and creative and at their most "primal" and destructive.

I hope to constantly evolve and strengthen my writing through experimentation with content, form, and imagery, as well as through recognizing and adapting innovative aspects I find in other poets' work.



## Burying koi

The orangest fish in the house died today.

He just lifted his fins and quit when I  
wasn't looking, after having threatened

the surface for hours. It's raining now  
and I don't know what to do with him, but  
settle for a water-filled baggie in

a shoebox. Outside water is sheeting  
off the roof and streaming through grass slicked flat  
to pour into the street. Near the curb things

are traveling-- a beer can, a flyer  
for a lost cat, and a magnolia leaf--  
all making their way down the street. The leaf

is a small boat. I set his box near the  
window so he can watch the leaf swim down,  
away, as I wait for the rain to stop.

When asleep the house is part cathedral

holding cold gray stone

stilled in cicada-full nights

and rain on gravel

I remember you

sleeping, child lost in the night,

calling for dragons

I don't know why we

stare off, unseeing, to think

back on what we lost

in the waiting time,

we remember only tone--

so still, so quiet

I am a city

I used to be a

small town where I knew

all of my neighbors

and the wisteria

dripped off the porch but

the zoning changed

the wisteria died

and I don't know half

these people walking

my streets.

## Tigers

You have to be stealth.

Fear can smell your shoe leather  
and will chase you snarling  
down side roads where only your  
fingers sticky slick against the  
graffiti walls can show you the way out.

You throw your shoes away in the vain hope  
it's shoes they want,  
but these tigers won't settle for shoes.

Oh, these tigers of the world are sly things.  
They shimmy in shadows,  
peer up from grates,  
drink from this coffee cup,  
and grin back through mirrors.

And these tigers like to eat.

Cracking spirits rather than bones,

lapping up dream marrow,  
until your eyes are no longer the still ones they were,  
and the room goes small and tall.

You feel them now.

Their purr echoing in your belly  
staying long after tigers slink away  
invisible.

A Child's Garden Inverted (we forget so much of who we were)

Uprooting the bonsai with a spoon,  
I remembered my fifth fall  
when I learned  
trees grew the mirror images of their roots,  
somehow  
mistaking the flat pancake of earth for glossy sheen.  
This mirror world  
clung to my own  
mirror feet missing mine  
by inches of dead grass.  
It made sense to my small self.  
Clipping the bonsai's roots,  
I imagined running through  
my inverted pop-up world,  
the reversed trees  
throwing their leaves  
red to the sky,  
as they did  
for my young mirror self  
to kick as we swung.

Letter to autumn (the imaginary season)

I threw graveyard dirt to believe in you

chanted and burned marigolds

their leathery petals

vanishing in map ridges marking

high low river

and some days you came through

like the pony that appeared in the driveway

when I was seven

bright shining real

only to eat the last apple

and go home to that place around the corner

where you live

and I don't

Moths

Walmart blew up

the night my father had his heart attack.

He was a stiff slate grey

slumped to the floor

quiet

ragdoll neck

as my mother blew into his bubblegum lungs

shocked.

In the car            then

In the hospital

In the waiting room

I sat knee to knee with my sister,

surrounded by relatives of the bleeding and broken,

most staring glassily towards the floor,

waiting.

Somehow

my godfather was there

tall



with jackets  
leading us outside to the curb  
to stare across the street where  
red engines pulsed beside police lights      wailing.

The fire was too far gone,  
though they sprayed it anyway,  
while we watched  
grateful for noise and light.

Paint cans      barbie limbs  
bullets      and      bikes  
flew up,  
reflecting us on the curb,  
too numb to cling to anything  
but light.

## Travel

I could keep driving  
until everything makes sense but  
even in bright white days  
where minutes stiffen  
there is never enough time

miles tick off as asphalt flecks by  
yellow lines always just out of sync with streetlights  
sidewalks crumble off into pasture  
barbwire fences even with the door frame  
all of this

yet some memories last  
of mountains and gouache  
of hum and grind  
of linen and crickets  
before returning to days weighted  
with how little can stay

Columbia

I think of Columbia,  
but as myself in second grade  
in a sun filled classroom at a  
broken desk next to Derrick Hall,  
an eighth child in eighth child's clothing,  
watching the Challenger fly  
into beautiful shards on the  
rabbit eared set the teacher brought from  
home. I know they hoped  
we wouldn't remember it like this.

It is something like the meat  
someone left along the ditch  
to kill the neighborhood dogs.  
Beautiful poison.

The dogs themselves  
already suspicious beyond their dogness  
of such unexpected  
unwanted beauty.

Tooth (daylily)

I broke a tooth  
last night as I slept  
waking to spit out  
the victim  
of locked jaws  
grinding  
as I  
dreamt  
of daylilies.

Awake we don't know our (sleeping) selves  
somehow always stepping out  
the very moment before  
(missed messenger style)  
but somehow each separate self (photonegative self)  
knows the other  
(stories rumor gossip)  
and remembers its stories  
enough to fabricate a binding  
(a thread a book)

weaving, lacing them shut—

into (in two)

one story.

So I can remember dream daylilies,

orange (with perfect spots),

that I can't reach

so frustrating (so orange)

that I could spit (teeth).

Talking with a dead love

I am dropping dead petals out of the window.

Left, they would kill the rest of the violet.

I think it is hard for you to remember

we kill parts of ourselves to live--

Parts that remember being human

once, and being real.

With all these deaths,

is there any left of an original self?

Can we protect what we love now

from ever changing?

Or is it destined to lie inside

remembered and no longer realized?

I wonder if the violet misses

lost petals and leaves.

If though they were stiffened and dropped,  
it wished to keep them with it,

resenting new furred leaves as they come.

## Frozen Mississippi

It was freshman, winter, finals.

I couldn't say anything to help Nikki,  
who sat outside our dorm  
and cried, tired.

At midnight it started sleeting.

We stripped our shoes to the toes,  
rolled jeans over knees  
and ran.

The pain was lovely.

The rough sidewalk felt hot,  
shining as it reflected our soles –  
so cold.

Blueing fingers drew in frozen sand.

Heels smacked concrete,  
going numb, loving sound –  
so alive.



Oxford

Nikki calls to say the slush has followed her from Mississippi to Utah and was now bumping against her sills like heat drunk bees. She wants a snow cover. She has things to hide. Mississippi has that effect on things.

That's our code for it, Mississippi. If you aren't in Tupelo, you're heading to Oxford faster than you'd like. It stays with you, clings to you. Mud always shows through.

Her mother hit herself when she found out Nikki was leaving. Broke two teeth. Those bump the windowsill now.

It always comes down to the weather.

We talk about Sarah, who hanged herself because of the weather. Going to the dirt to avoid becoming silt. She never got a funeral, because she lived in spite of the heat and magnolias.

There were pink teacup blossoms outside of \_\_\_\_\_ when she was taken in. Always a blank there, she'll never say. It's name something worse than the pressure of the river. Where she was told God had no time for the hopeless. She understood.

Mixing meds

There is nothing beautiful in the way

I can hear the schlick of your heels

on the hardwood as you walk down the hall.

No one is breathing now anyway--

you remember the way cold water hurts when it hits your chest.

Even now I can remember kicking Aimee's chair in English.

Not her, really

but that the chair had baby blue gum cemented to the metal.

can the dead remember?

Maybe she could, some,

a handful of blue and a handful of yellow

and a coke.

Maybe even her head smacking the desktop

during the AP exam

when the rest of us wrote on the toad and the lawnmower

Alive again,  
she told me a dream:  
fingers crossed  
jaws knotted  
in an elevator dropping, she  
laughed through bared teeth,  
pushing her way back

I smashed a clover once  
and watched it stain my fingertip a fine green  
settling into the grooves of my fingerprint.  
The tang made me aware of the underside of my tongue--  
overwhelmingly green and not there at all,  
like staring at a light bulb and then blinking away  
to see the purple afterimage.

Aimee said, that's it.

## Unsent Letters

Going through my desk

I find letter after letter

stamped and unsent.

There are so many things

that should have been said--

his fingers,

the sound of hard rain

as it bubbles up the silt,

razor raw taste of battery touched tongue,

holding breath under bath water

and the part where you should have run like hell

from yourself

but

letters lie in drawers and

closure hops on one

leaden foot

half shoved across the floor

struggling closer,

falling dead

two feet

from where I've been

unable to mail the parts in you

long dead.

Long blue nights

of cicadas sounding

cars, trucks

on loose gravel

an old fan humming

in the back room

over the dog lying

in front of it

blocking air

blowing fur

under the bed

you lie on

watching the paneling

flash the cell tower's pulse

with the deep breathing

sleeper next to you

tossing

sighing

a foot out of cover

a foot you

wonder if you love anymore

lying awake

exhaling dust and mint

One thousand clay men

I throw late at night

the day after my breakup

alone in the studio

but for Jacob

while we both ignore the subject.

I watch his fingers push into the clay figures

long precise movements

thumbprints on an eyelid

index finger hollowing out a mouth

all are tall and lean

narrowing from shoulders down

drawing souls from solidarity

power from their numbers

I try not to notice

he never looks up

while forming his clay culture

head tucked

fingers pressing



thumbs quick

I work with my back to him

comforted by the growing legion

as they stare ahead

smelling fresh from saggar fires

keeping us from being alone together

or thinking of three am wood kiln shifts

so he won't have to mention he saw me cry

holding the last too-warm beer

sifting embers to ash.

## Lightning

When I was small  
I told my parents  
I would die at 23,  
and now that it's  
here I wonder how  
much power child's  
words have.

Last night dreaming,  
I could remember dying,  
and I hoped  
tonight death would be  
    lightning  
breaking open the sky's blue,

appearing like streetlights and fireflies  
suddenly,  
    but ordered  
paced down the street and through the grass--  
    quiet,

sound too slow for the impact.  
like the time a transformer blew,  
shocking the late night sky  
in a gush of greens and blues  
outshining the stars I had just found  
so brilliant.

## Disaster plan

Our parents would hug us and tell us how lucky we were to live so near the base.

When the bomb hit we wouldn't have to worry, we wouldn't have to survive.

Still, when the black planes and helicopters sliced into the skies above our house all the birds would go quiet and we would run inside to hide.

By age 7 my sister couldn't stop washing her hands. Anxious to get her seated the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher had told her the bugs in the classroom flowers were going to eat her brain.

I had a quarter taped to a small square of cardboard that I kept in the velcro pocket of my shoe. It had my aunt's New York number and a speech written on it.

In case of earthquake, our elementary was third priority for rescue at the university, after the physical plant and the preschool.

This was strangely comforting. I remember comparing quarter cards with other kids. No one had stickers or stars. Mom said people do well to remember their names.

I was given a book about planting seeds. The drawn children wore gardening gloves and you couldn't see their feet. I knew they had chapped hands and pockets on their shoes.

## Cemetery rubbings

The day my mother decided she was dying  
she rode rollercoasters,  
mean ones.

She screamed and sung,  
the way we all do  
when we realize it  
might as well be a  
dream.

We frequented cemeteries,  
carefully stepping over rows,  
fingers running  
over the grit and  
cold of monuments,  
searching for the right places  
to take out butcher paper  
stretch and tape  
and then  
she'd sit  
still  
two thumbs at corners

and watch  
as I pushed black wax across,  
    keeping every dent and rise  
        of the lambs and lilies  
            mason and soldier,  
until our wax grew too small.

My mother as blood

I don't remember my mother's nipples.

I don't remember her skin keeping me afloat.

And I can only guess what she thought looking at me gasping and new.

My father says she looked terrified and she still jokes about how Mt. St. Helens and

Three Mile Isle both on my birthday concerned her, but these are only half truths.

Ours was a house of girl-- mom, my sister, and me. I think it makes my father lonely still.

I watch my mother now singing onstage, eyes on the conductor, shoulders back,

and think of the songs she teaches the parrot to tease us with after she has died.

This isn't the first time she's prepared for death, the first time we spit and rode roller coasters, and last time we crayoned butcher paper in Faulkner's cemetery. I've long since stopped being serious about dying. She cried teaching the bird "Happy Trails". I swore to teach it to all the birds and have them waddle up to the podium during the funeral.

How parasitic children are taking what is thrust at them,

but how lucky to continue to know that of which they take.

Meteor shower

My mother calls to tell me

she is too something,

too tired maybe,

to sleep

that she lost God under her

own mother's casket

that she dreams our house is a church

and she has to keep the robbers

from wedging their feet

in the door

then asks me

why she can't lie

why we have to be so good

and I remember waiting for the Perseids,

the last lime wedge

falling to the base



of the clear plastic pitcher  
as she chased it with a spoon,  
  
telling me to watch the fireflies  
fall into their pattern,  
an exacted space for each one,  
signaling to each other for miles  
across the hills,  
saying something  
untouchable and distant.

## Palmistry at Wildwood

Reading palms again in my godfather's shop  
the air smells of wood and water  
and the flowers are more exotic than I remember,  
punching up in spikes of red and warm yellow  
saffron and curry  
diving down into slick smudges of emerald.

My godfather and my mother sit on a tall bench at the back wall  
kicking their legs as they pull  
rouge across their cheeks  
while checking their lipstick in small round mirrors.  
They have more arms than they should  
but use them all laughing  
flicking their heels into the violets.

I remember my job and wait  
at the side table turned brilliant blue,  
glass over the line drawings of hands  
creased and well worn on pages  
glued to the table top years ago.

Their lines move and wink  
as the hand wash into each other.

When I look up my mother has moved,  
she chimes in the doorway as a small tin bird,  
her blue door swinging wide to let in  
street air and the storm lingering across the road.  
The sky boils darkly above the mountains and  
pasture that have appeared across the street.  
The grass is still and lit by an absent sun.

I leave the shop and cross the raw air  
leading to the pasture.

The grass itself is shining.

I pick the first clover I see,  
it has ten leaves but vanishes.

I look at my palms and  
find them empty, lineless.

Block of light

Tonight's sky hangs low,  
an incredibly bright,  
intense blue piled  
with clouds  
massive and high.

Its light overwhelms,  
a bulb's  
brilliant flash  
before black,

too much to see.

I fall hitting  
tree roots,  
dust and pebbles,

knocking free a block  
of sky,  
odd against grass--  
stranger still the void above.

I panic

and rush to

fix the block

who laughs,

too light and cold to touch,

refusing repair,

glad at the dark hole,

where dark things now swim.

I stand on the block

steady on ripped edges

and climb through,

kicking to prove reality.

## Teaching Alligators

This time the sky hangs  
still and steel grey,  
painted in black  
clouds not moving.

I'm working out a way to shake these kids.  
They all have nametags on, but I can't read them.  
I know they used to be alligators.

Trees grow larger  
as I look at them.  
Their leaves flying to  
branch across dead grass.

I can't remember why I am there.  
I left the books and my shoes wherever I was.  
The once-reptiles are unsympathetic.

Something dark falls out of the largest oak  
and the alligators run to kick at it.

My chance to run.

I don't.

The dark thing breaks loose to come at me.

It flies at me from  
every angle at once,  
all dark and blur,  
almost familiar, as it  
begins to bite me again and again.

I know I still won't leave it.

An unreal flurry of fur and tooth  
speaks in low growls,  
words flowing from teeth to skin,  
singing through my pain  
that I must never run.

## Crowd Dream

So dark here,  
dull greys and blues--  
autumn.

People crowd  
all around me  
with faces that twitch  
and fade in  
static,  
electricity.

I put my hand out and  
it shoves through them,  
into sticky molasses  
inside--  
almost-living tissue, slick,  
curves  
under my fingers.  
It should be staying,  
lasting, or hot,  
but as I pull my fingers out,



nothing remained on my skin,  
no sound,  
no mark-  
ghosts.

I can feel myself alive.

I want something else  
to be alive too.

This want aches my skin.

I know it won't hold this life much longer.

I'm frantic.

I can see colors again--

all at once,

brilliantly,

and then, only one.

A live green,

the fresh, sun-filled color of

blades,

sap--

clover

appearing as single sprig,

then a field.

I realize my fingertips won't hold

much longer.

I grab up handfuls of clover,

loving the sounds of the pull and snap.

I needed these.

I shove fistfuls of green into

static figures around me,

holding it inside them

until they glow.

Their faces still and firm,

eyes open and warmed fingers reach my face.

"Ah," they tell me,

"this is what we forgot."

"Push more.

We remember."

Cruel dreams and a citywide bus system

Heat sticky stray hair clings to your forehead  
as you lean against the dusty window  
watching asphalt fleck by through mud stains.

Broken glass glitters under streetlights  
against dense shadows of grate and curb,  
making you a space-age asphalt traveler  
hurling through the galaxy of I-240  
weightless but for the bad taste in the back of your mind.

Some should-have-been memory, fiercer for a night's rest,  
relentlessly rocks and nods from the bench behind your left ear,  
just in case you could forget this is as good as it gets  
riding in metro vinyl glory's sticky heat  
trying to leave cruel dreams a stop behind.

## Blood and Bones

In a semi-dark room,  
where the scrapes of  
charcoal on bellies  
and inked in spines  
try to fill too-white  
paper with the stiff  
shadows of models,

there is nothing to think of  
but light and darkness and skin,  
where underneath  
hidden  
bone and blood gnarl together-

I remember us  
and coffee and  
counting bones  
late nights in your  
faunal lab as you  
learned to seek

causes of death

in the tawny shards,

while I drew,

stunned shading,

too much blood-

lines and shadow unable to find where

in the mechanical sputterings of shards

animal memories were once formed before

time hit, leaving them greening

and fading as photographs in the sun.

## Line drawing

Christy killed herself five years ago. I find this note in my pocket and turn it over again. There are no words, just a line drawing of Patsy Cline, but I know what it means. The paper is folded and worn-- I must have done this before. The bus is almost here because the overcrowded bench has stood up and is collectively shifting bags from hand to hand. I flip the card again and don't hear the bus when it comes but make it on anyway. I settle into an empty seat and watch the curb. The low hum and steady bouncing of the bus combined with the rhythmic flash of the curb under the streetlights holds me in the seat. The bus shudders to a rest under a red light. A small sedan, blue, pulls to a stop next to me. Its headlights catch in the glass front of a newspaper box, sending the glare directly at my window. I won't look; I know the picture, taken a month before her housemates broke down the blue bathroom door to find her floating just beneath the surface. Guilt wafts up in my bones as I shift on the ripped green vinyl. The brakes squeal loose and the grin vanishes into the shadows again. The other passengers all still frown into their laps waiting for the right stop so they can shuffle their bags together and slump back to the sidewalk. The curb still flashes by outside. I try to concentrate on my stop too, ignoring the smiles that flash from every street corner, but am comforted knowing they are still there five years later. It must mean something.

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## **Vita**

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